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NOTES ON THE KENDALL HOUSE
6 MACK HILL ROAD
AMHERST, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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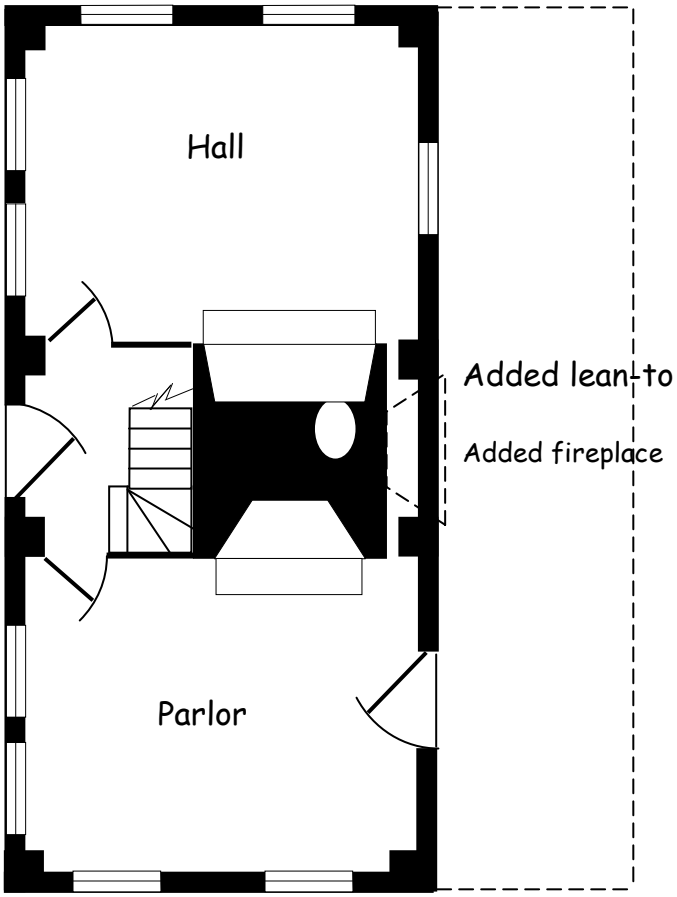
MAY 31, 2010

These notes are based on a brief inspection of the Kendall House on the afternoon of May 29, 2010. The purpose of the inspection was to attempt to outline the evolution of the house, which has been depicted in several versions in differing accounts, and to define its function as it grew from a center-chimney dwelling of ordinary size into a "double house" of twice the volume of the original dwelling, with added features to adapt it for use as a tavern. Present at the inspection were David and Susan Clark, the owners; William Veillette of Amherst; and James L. Garvin.

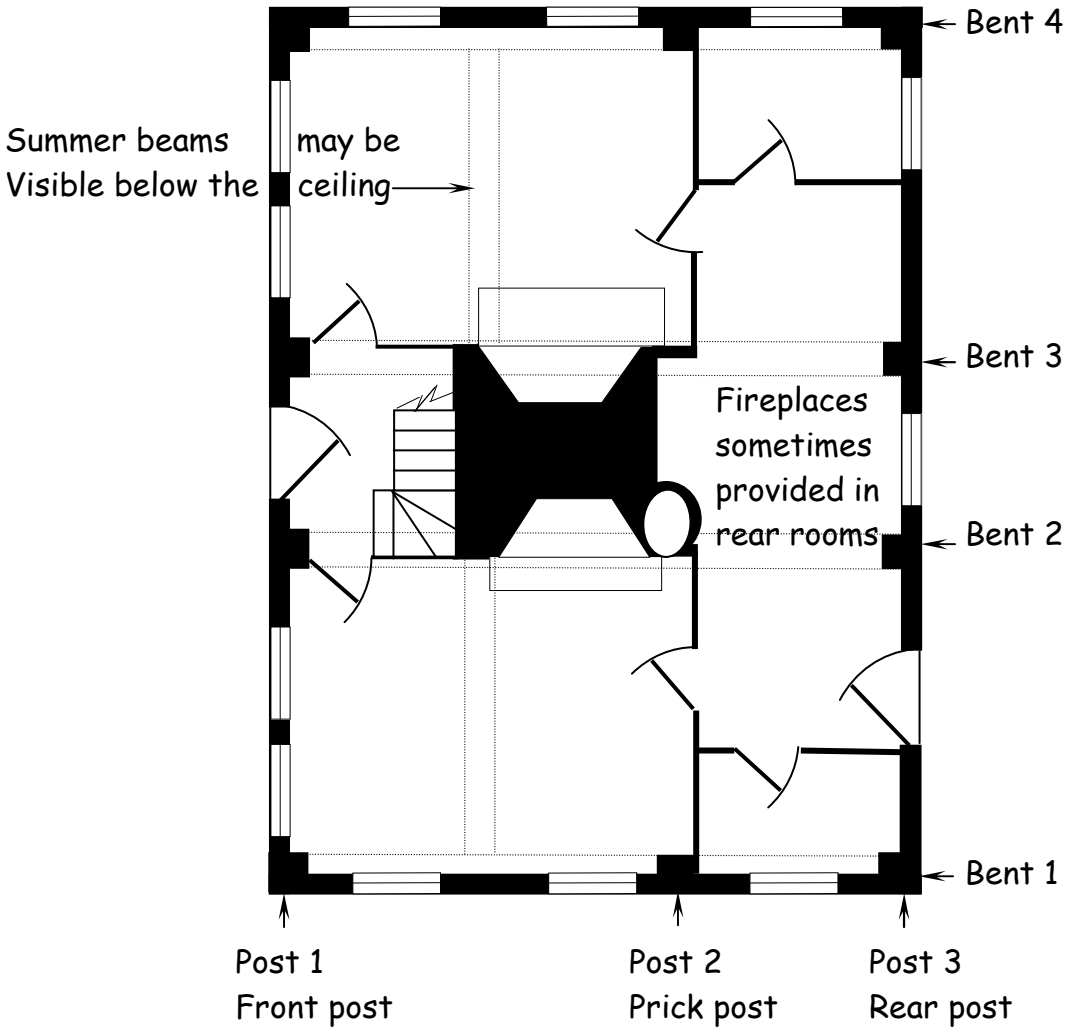
Summary: Based on this brief physical inspection of the dwelling, the Kendall House appears to have started its existence as a south-facing center-chimney dwelling with two principal rooms on the first floor, two bedchambers above, and a range of additional but subordinate rooms in a portion of the house behind the chimney. This type of center-chimney dwelling, with its distinctive frame and floor plan, was in use in coastal New Hampshire beginning around 1725 and persisted as a favored house form in New Hampshire for about a century. The currently available documentary record indicates that the center-chimney dwelling stood on this site by 1772 under the ownership of Nahum Baldwin, but persistent rumors about the house having been moved to this lot, if true, would suggest that the building began its existence elsewhere before 1772. Shortly after 1790, under the new ownership of Nathan Kendall, Jr., the house was enlarged through the addition of a large supplementary frame to the rear of the older dwelling. The new frame, higher-posted than the old, converted the space that had formerly existed as a subordinate area behind the chimney into a two-story entry or stair hall with a new principal doorway facing east. Beyond that entry, the new frame provided a range of two rooms on each floor: a parlor and kitchen on the first story, and two bedchambers above. The bedchamber at the northeast corner of the addition was adapted as a small ballroom through the provision of a hinged partition that permits the chamber and the upper entry to be converted to a single space for dancing or meetings. There is evidence that the former kitchen in the older portion of the

dwelling was converted to a tavern taproom. Nathan Kendall, Jr., was recorded as a licensed innholder by 1795. As enlarged, the dwelling was reoriented with its principal façade facing east toward the highway (today Mack Hill Road), was provided with a second large chimney, and was covered with an expansive hipped roof that unified the dwelling visually and, from the exterior, disguised the fact that the house had been built in two stages with different ceiling heights in each. The enlarged dwelling was now a "double house" in eighteenth-century terminology, resembling the nearby Colonel Robert Means House, which had been built as a well-finished double house in 1785 and had established this form of dwelling as the largest type of domestic building to be seen in Amherst before the nineteenth century.

Evolution of the center-chimney dwelling as a New Hampshire house form: The original south-facing house conformed to a building type that had become popular during the early 1700s in coastal New Hampshire and had moved inland with new settlements as the largest form of center-chimney dwelling usually attempted. Still earlier, at an undetermined time in the seventeenth century, a smaller form of central-chimney house had appeared in New England and New Hampshire and had become established as a standard house type. Called a "hall-and-parlor" house, this first version of a central chimney dwelling had a hall, or combined kitchen and sitting room, on one side of its chimney, and a hall, or formal parlor, on the opposite side. Above were two corresponding bedchambers, reached by a triple-run staircase in front of the side of the chimney that faced the front door of the house. Sometimes, a hall-and parlor house might be enlarged by means of a lean-to at the back, providing a subordinate set of rooms, or even a rear kitchen, behind the chimney, as seen below:



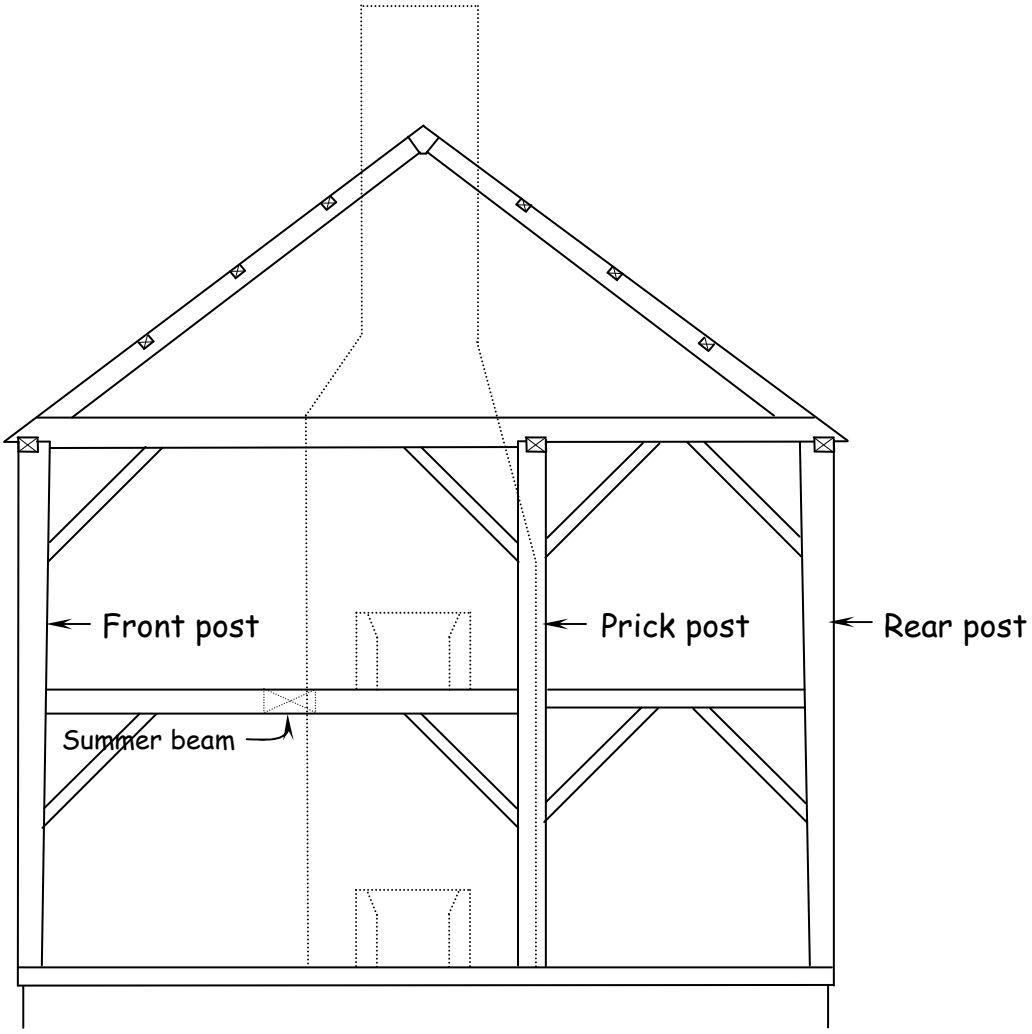
It is apparent that by the early 1700s, the occasional provision of a lean-to addition at the rear of the hall-and parlor house had led to the concept of a full range of rooms, on both the first and second stories, behind the chimney, creating a two-story, two-room-deep, center-chimney dwelling. This new vernacular dwelling type became a dominant urban and rural house form in southeastern New Hampshire during the 1720s, and remained dominant for a full century. A typical floor plan of such a house looks like this, sometimes with a fireplace heating the first- and/or second-floor rooms behind the chimney. Just as often, these rooms were unheated and used for storage or occupied only in warm weather.



Two-Room-Deep Center Chimney House
Probably the original floor plan of the Baldwin-Kendall House

Typically, the frame of such a house was laid out with four bents, each containing three wall posts: one at the front wall, one at the rear wall, and a prick post, placed about two-thirds of the way from the front to the rear wall. These posts define a dividing line between the front and rear ranges of rooms. The prick posts in the two bents at the center of the house are placed close to the chimney. In most houses of this type, the framing timbers in the rear range of rooms are

lighter in dimensions than those in the larger front range of rooms, denoting the subordinate nature of the rear rooms. Where summer beams (also called "bridging joists") are present to support the smaller common joists of the floors, as they are in the Kendall House, these heavy timbers exist only in the front, or principal, rooms on each side of the chimney.



The earliest house that has thus far been identified with the framing characteristics of this vernacular house form is the Benjamin James House in Hampton. In 2001, the James House was dated to 1723 by dendrochronology. Dendrochronology is the use of tree ring sequences to date a timber in a building. Utilizing the fact that seasonal fluctuations in rain, sun, and temperature produce variations in tree growth that are more or less uniform for all trees of a given species in a given region, dendrochronology utilizes the annual variations in tree ring spacing or width for certain tree species to date the wooden member. If the member includes the tree's bark or the cambium layer (composed of formerly living cells) immediately beneath the bark, the range of years through which the tree grew can be correlated with already-determined tree-ring sequences. The year in which the tree was cut (and the building presumably erected) can be told from the presence of the cambium, representing the last year of the tree's life.

A limitation of dendrochronology in New Hampshire has been the previous lack of tree-ring sequences for this region. A second limitation has been the concentration of researchers on tree-ring sequences of hardwood, particularly oak, rather than softwood species. The species represented in the earliest portion of the Kendall House have not yet been identified, but it is likely that most framing members of this older house were hewn from eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) or red or Norway pine (*Pinus rigida*), which appears to be used for floor boards throughout the house, with eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) likely also to be represented.

Until the wood species in the house are identified, we will not know whether the science of dendrochronology has been developed to the point where it may help to date this building. Recent research has reportedly begun to develop master tree-ring chronologies for eastern white pine and eastern hemlock, so it is possible that dendrochronology may permit the accurate dating of the older house and of the circa 1790 addition, described below.

The two-story, two-room-deep, center-chimney tradition that was first defined in the James House in Hampton would persist at least until the 1820s and the advent of airtight stoves. By the 1830s, heating and cooking by open fireplaces began to be replaced by heating and cooking by airtight cast iron stoves. At that point, construction of large and complex central chimneys generally ceased, and the carpentry traditions that had accompanied the use of such chimneys began to evolve into newer and less complex framing methods.

The following description of the frame of the James House of 1723 in Hampton might answer for a description of the earlier frame of the Kendall House in Amherst:

> The [frame of the] James House is composed of four bents, which are assemblages of posts, girts at the second story level, and tie beams at the roof level. Each bent is a structural frame that runs through the depth of the house from front to back. Two of the bents define the end walls of the house. The two inner bents define the chimney bay at the center of the structure.
>
> Each bent has three posts: one in the plane of the front wall (façade) of the house; one in the plane of the rear wall; and a third, called a prick post, defining a plane that runs just behind the rear face of the original central chimney. The prick posts mark the transition from the front rooms of the house to the rear rooms, and help to support partitions that separate front rooms from rear rooms. . . .
>
> The tops of the posts in each of the four bents of the frame are linked together in two directions. Each bent is connected to adjacent bents by three wall plates. One [plate] lies at the top of the front wall of the house, and one at the top of the rear wall. A third wall plate, which might be called a chimney or medial plate, connects the tops of the prick posts and runs through the length of the house just behind the chimney stack. The tops of the posts are connected through the depth of the house by tie beams, which rest upon the wall plates and are secured to the plates by lapped dovetail joints cut into the upper surfaces of the plates and the lower surfaces of the ties. The tie beams link the front and rear wall plates of the

> building and provide support for the feet of the rafters, resisting the tendency of the rafters to spread outward under wind and snow loading. . . .
>
> The house has six sets of rafters, four of which are supported by the four bents of the house. Intermediate tie beams, not supported by the four bents, span the depth of the house halfway between the end walls and the chimney bents, supporting the feet of an additional two sets of rafters. . . .[1]

The Older Portion of the Kendall House: We made no attempt to date the frame of the older house that forms the southern section of the Kendall house. The lower elements of the frame are almost completely covered by plaster or planed casings, and the roof of the original house has been entirely replaced, as described below. Dating of the older house might be approximated by a more careful study of the profiles of moldings and paneling, but dendrochronology would probably provide the most accurate period for construction of the older house if good timbers, retaining the original bark, are located for sampling. Because the profiles of moldings and the style of raised paneling did not change much from the early 1700s until almost 1800, purely stylistic attributes of the older house do not appear to differ much in general appearance from those of the newer portion that dates from after 1790.

As noted in the summary on page 1, the documentary record shows that Nahum Baldwin purchased the land on which the Kendall House now stands in 1772. William Jones, yeoman, sold Nahum Baldwin, gentleman, 1 acre and 71 rods of land at this location on May 18, 1772.[2] Whether the older portion of the Kendall House was built new on this lot after 1772 or moved as an existing house from another location, it is clear that the original house had an excavated cellar only under its eastern half. The present cellar occupies this area, with slight enlargements that were carried out when the new frame was added to the old house after 1790. Visual indications in the stonework of the foundation reveal coherent masonry to a point below the original rear (northern) sill of the older house, with a few feet of stonework of a different character north of

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[1] Lisa Mausolf with James L. Garvin, National Register nomination, Benjamin James House, Hampton, New Hampshire. On file at the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

[2] Hillsborough County Registry of Deeds, Book 3, page 100, as cited in Bill Veillette and Jackie Marshall, "Nathan Kendall Jr. House Chronology," updated May 29, 2010, n.55. Endnote 471 of this chronology outlines some of the confusion that has obscured the history of the older house. "[Emma P. Boylston] Locke, [comp., *Colonial Amherst: The Early History, Customs and Homes* (Milford, N. H.: W. B. and A. B. Rotch, 1916)], p. 80. This citation is very likely the source of Robert Rowe's interpretation in his book, *Colonial Amherst Village: Amherst, New Hampshire* (July 1995), p. 30, in which he writes that the northern (not southern) half was moved from Cricket Corner. Rowe also states that the southern half dates to 1750, and the northern half to 1775. He does not indicate his sources for these dates. Rowe and Locke appear to have their stories crossed. Locke's information is probably based on tradition, and as with much tradition, it is probably not exactly correct, nor entirely wrong. We can definitively state the following: 1) the lower-posted southern half of the house is older than the northern half; and 2) the higher-posted northern half was likely added to the southern half to create a "double house" with a hipped roof. It is possible—but not (yet) provable —that the southern half of the mansion was moved from Cricket Corner, where Nahum Baldwin lived prior to moving to Amherst's village. The dates of the two structures could possibly be proved through analysis of the tree ring growth in their original timbers (i.e., dendrochronology). If both halves were built *in situ,* deed research would suggest the earliest dates of 1772 (for the southern half) and 1790 (for the northern half). It is reasonable to hypothesize that Nathan Kendall Jr. is the one who enlarged the house, as Nahum Baldwin was too involved in the Revolutionary War during the time he owned it, and Cyrus Baldwin of Dunstable never lived in the house when he owned it."

this point, where the basement was enlarged slightly after 1790. The location of this line in the masonry, indicating the original rear wall of the basement, and the survival of the original northern sill of the old house, show that the original dwelling had a range of rooms behind the chimney, obliterated by later changes as described below. The house generally reflected the floor plan shown on page 3 of this report.

Transformation of the old house to the current dwelling: A dramatic change transformed the dwelling after 1790. The documentary record shows that Nahum Baldwin, Esq., sold his cousin Cyrus Baldwin of Dunstable, merchant, 67 acres of land on current Mack Hill Road, Amherst, [including Nahum's house at the current address of 6 Mack Hill Road] plus six square rods of land "opposite my house" in January, 1783. In October, 1790, Cyrus Baldwin of Dunstable sold Nathan Kendall, Jr. of Amherst, Esq., 67 acres of land on Mack Hill Road, Amherst, plus six square rods of land "opposite my house" at 6 Mack Hill Road (October 27).[3]

It appears that Kendall acted quickly to enlarge what had been a relatively small house into a capacious dwelling that was licensed as a tavern by 1795 if not earlier.[4] By this time, given precedents like the Col. Robert Means House, the ideal for a large dwelling in Amherst was the "double house." By the eighteenth-century definition, a double house was a two-chimney, two-story dwelling with a central entry or stairhall. The floor plan had been introduced into New Hampshire as early as 1716, when Portsmouth merchant Archibald Macpheadris commissioned immigrant craftsman John Drew to design a large brick dwelling of this floor plan in Portsmouth. Thereafter and until the end of the eighteenth century, the double house plan was accepted as the standard for a large house. Many examples were built in the New Hampshire seacoast during the 1700s. Inland, fewer merchants or traders amassed the wealth to commission the construction of such a dwelling. Such houses were always rare in inland communities.

To transform the existing center chimney house into a double house, it appears that Kendall dismantled most of the northern portion of the frame of the older house, retaining that portion of the building, between the front posts and the prick posts, which included the larger and more highly finished rooms of the standing building. The principal reason for removing the rear section of the old house was that the new portion, including the entry or stair hall, was intended to have ceilings of greater height than could be accommodated within the old frame. The rooms in the old house retain floor-to-ceiling heights of 7'-4", while the stairhall and the rooms to its north have floor to ceiling heights of 7'-11." To reconcile these differing room heights, the first floor elevation was maintained uniformly throughout the house. The rooms in the older house, being lower-posted, have lower floor elevations on the second story than the second floor elevation of the stairhall, requiring one to step down into the older chambers. To provide a

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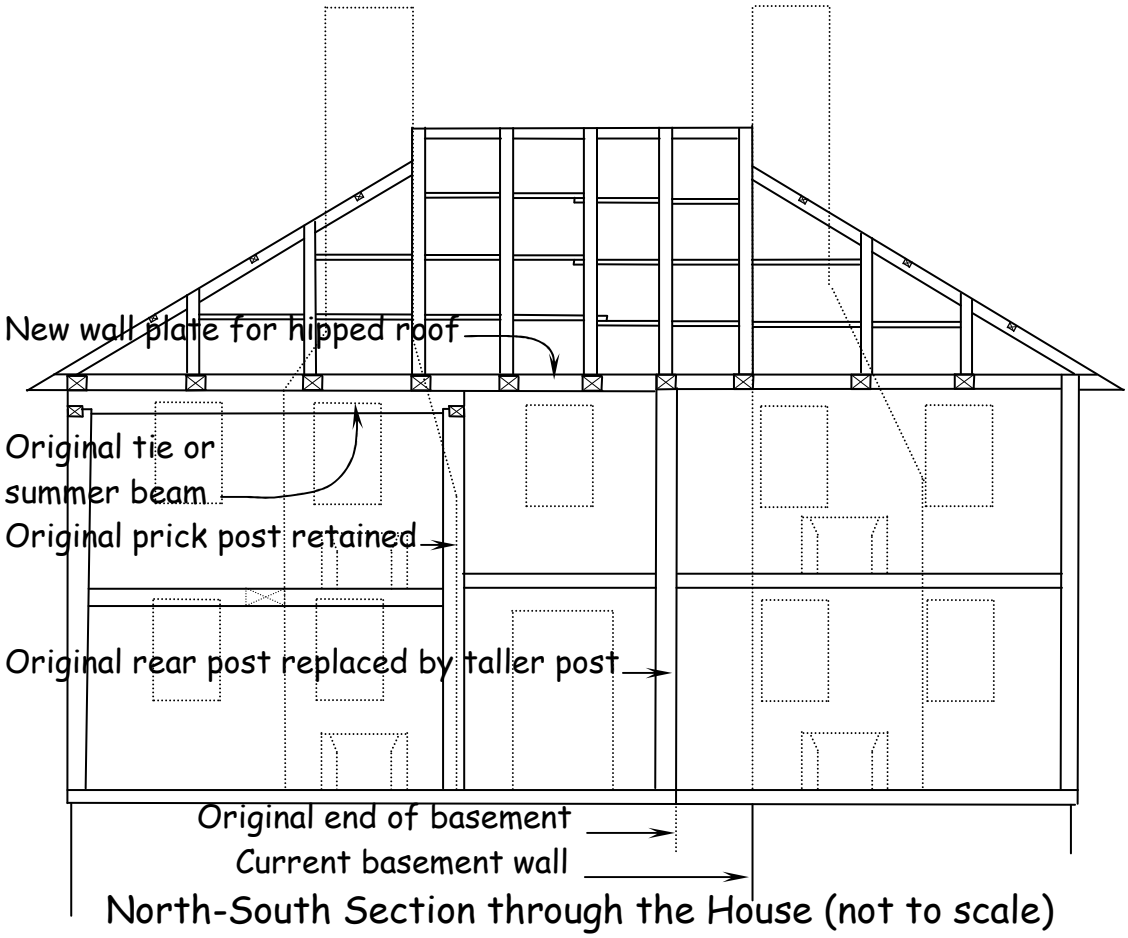
[3]Hillsborough Registry of Deeds, Book 9, Page 289, as cited in Bill Veillette and Jackie Marshall, "Nathan Kendall Jr. House Chronology," updated May 29, 2010, n.151; Nahum Baldwin Esq., & Martha Baldwin (grantors) his wife, both of Amherst, received £800 paid by Cyrus Baldwin (grantee), of Dunstable, Merchant, in January 1783 for pieces of land in Amherst. Hillsborough Registry of Deeds, Book 23, Page 528, as cited in Veillette and Marshall, n.186; Cyrus Baldwin (grantor) of Dunstable, Massachusetts, Esq., received £210 paid by Nathan Kendall, (grantee) Jr. Esq., of Amherst, on October 27, 1790 for land in Amherst.

[4]*The Amherst Journal, and the New-Hampshire Advertiser,* Vol. I, No. 30 (Amherst, N.H., August 7, 1795), p. 3, as cited in Veillette and Marshall (n.204), lists Kendall as an innholder.

uniform roof over both frames, the carpenters set a new wall plate on top of the plate of the older southern house, as shown below.

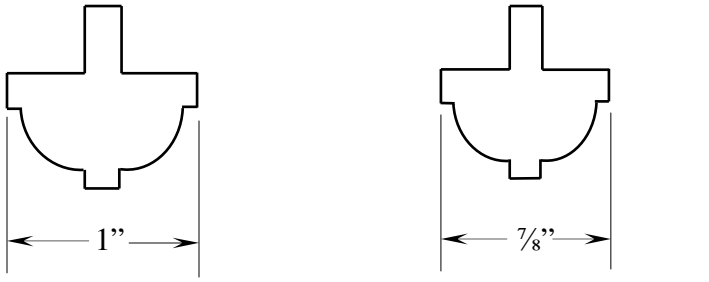


North-South Section through the House (not to scale)

The addition of the extensive frame and the expansive new hipped roof to the older house largely hid the identity of the original building, at least as seen from the exterior. As may be seen from the drawing above, however, the attainment of symmetry and uniformity on the new façade required some subtle adjustments. Because the ceiling height of the addition is 7'-11" and the ceilings heights of the older house are 7'-4" on the first story and 7'-1" on the second, the use of large windows on the façade caused the tops of the sashes to project above the bottoms of the girt and wall plate of the old frame on the new east-facing façade. This required that a pocket for the window tops be cut from the exterior faces of these beams. While the intersection of windows and beams is invisible from the exterior, it is noticeable inside the house. The extra labor of fitting windows to lower ceiling heights was avoided on the side elevations of the house by using slightly smaller sashes. While the window glass on the façade measures 7" by 9", the glass of the windows on the north and south sides of the house measures 6" by 8."

With one exception, every window in the house appears to have been modernized after the building was enlarged. (The current sashes in the rooms at the rear of the house date from the

twentieth century, so it is impossible to be certain of the character of the older sashes here.) The one window that was left unaltered by the modernization is the transom sash over the original front door of the Baldwin house, which became the southern side door of the new double house. The window muntins of the new sashes retain the characteristic profile of the 1700s. In keeping with a slow evolution that occurred throughout the eighteenth century, however, the muntins of the sashes of the 1790 remodeling are slightly less wide than the older transom sash.

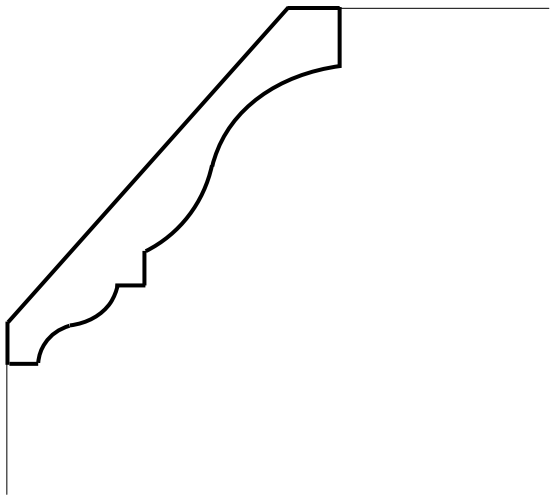


Transom sash Sashes of circa 1790

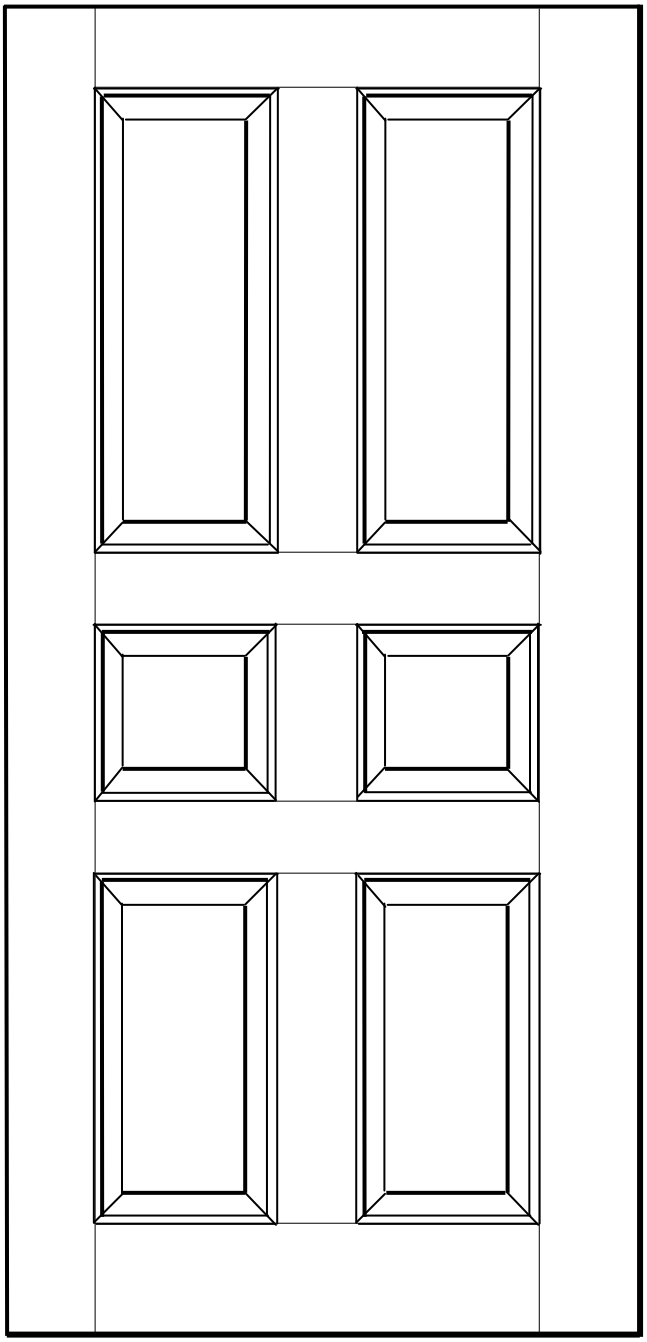
Architectural character of the addition: The interior of the original house was left largely unchanged after the building was enlarged. In the southeast front room of the enlarged and reoriented house, for example, the paneled fireplace wall was retained. In keeping with a relatively early date, this wall displays two tiers of raised pine panels, separated by a horizontal rail. This room includes two fixtures that may have been added by Kendall, or may precede his ownership of the property. These are sets of bookshelves, with cabinets below, secured by doors, which were built into the northeast and southeast corners of the room, facing the fireplace. These appear to have functioned in a manner equivalent to that of a desk and bookcase of the period, providing bookshelves above and storage cabinets below. The two units were built in a straightforward manner, being nailed together with hand-forged, rose-headed nails. They could have been used for the safekeeping of a private library or of business records.

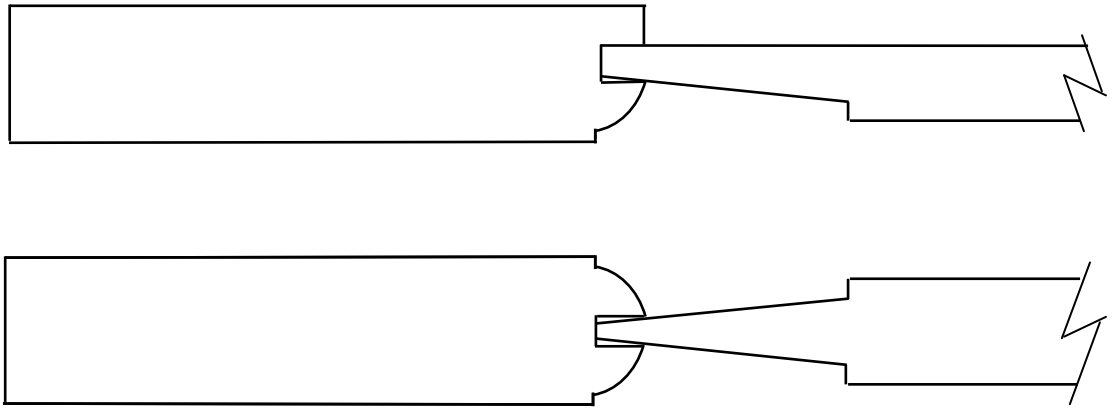
As noted below, the western first-floor room of the older house shows evidence of having been converted to the taproom of the tavern that Nathan Kendall, Jr., was licensed to keep.

The rooms in the added sections of the house display dignified joiner's work of the Georgian pattern. Several of the rooms have the characteristic crown molding that was standard throughout most of the eighteenth century:

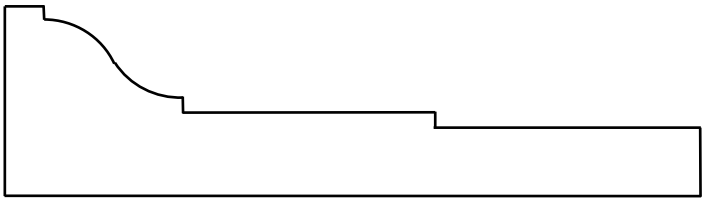


Doors are four- or six-panel, depending on their location. Those that connect the lower stairhall to adjoining rooms in the front of the house are double-faced to present their characteristic raised panels to view both in the room and in the adjoining stairhall.





In the more elaborate rooms, the door and window openings are framed by casings that utilize molded backbands, but otherwise are relatively plain:



In the older house, by contrast, most of the windows have flat, square-edged casings with a recess or rebate around their inner perimeter. This detail usually denotes the former presence of hinged interior shutters that fold flat against the wall on each side of the window when they are not closed. The former presence of such shutters can often be detected by evidence of nail holes from H hinges on the casings. No such evidence was apparent on the casings we examined, but this may be due to the thoroughness with which these painted surfaces were smoothed and filled for recent repainting. Hinged shutters were common in the eighteenth century, but have almost always been removed in more recent times because they serve little purpose when windows are not shuttered at night, and they prevent the hanging of modern window curtains.

Possible tavern-related changes to the older house: As noted previously, Nathan Kendall, Jr., was named in the *Amherst Journal* as an innholder in 1795. Together with the home and the meeting house, the tavern was essential to New Hampshire life in the 1700s and early 1800s. The tavern provided for every need of the person or animal on the road in an age when travel was often dangerous and unpleasant, and when safety and nourishment were essential for man and beast. The tavern offered shelter, warmth, and light after dark. It provided wholesome food for man and animal. It offered a secure place to impound the herds and droves that once filled New England's roads on their way to market. It provided a place for the traveling world to exchange news and goods with the settled world. It offered a place to hold public, business, and

private meetings. It became a place of refuge and care for those who were sick or injured away from home.

Because of the crucial role it played in New England society, the tavern was carefully licensed under provincial and state laws. Only men or women of substantial means and good standing in a community were permitted to keep a public house. Innholders were usually leading citizens, wealthy enough to build large structures that could serve the needs of many travelers at a time. Ownership of a tavern often increased a person's wealth still more, especially if the tavern was on a well-traveled highway that brought many customers or was chosen as a gathering place for militia troops at military musters.

Tavern buildings ranged widely in size and form, partly depending on whether they served a sparsely-settled rural area or a village on a well-traveled turnpike. A village tavern was often considerably larger than the average dwelling and might contain two kitchens for extensive cooking, as did the Kendall House following its enlargement. As expert chefs, tavernkeepers were New Hampshire's first caterers. When Royal Governor John Wentworth was inaugurated in 1767, Portsmouth tavernkeeper James Stoodley served a hundred guests a feast that included a dozen turkeys, two dozen ducks, three dozen chickens, fifty pounds of pork, and tongue, bacon, veal, and codfish, not to mention great quantities of liquor and punch.

Taverns almost invariably had a barroom, sometimes with an elaborate enclosed bar and sometimes with only a locked closet for liquors. Alcohol was considered an essential part of the American diet in the 1700s and early 1800s, and was consumed in greater quantities than today. Alcohol ranged from humble fermented cider—most taverns had extensive orchards, and cellars filled with cider casks—to West India rum or wine from Spain or Portugal. Liquors were drunk straight, flavored with sugar or spices, mulled with red-hot irons, or mixed into elaborate fruit punches that were often drunk from large bowls that were passed around the table from hand to hand. Beginning in the 1820s, a temperance movement curtailed the consumption of alcohol, and some taverns even cut down their orchards and became "temperance houses," serving only tea and coffee.

Taverns often had enough extra bedchambers and beds for many guests, but under crowded conditions, lodgers were sometimes compelled to sleep several to a room and even two to a bed with a perfect stranger of the same sex.

The tavern offered much more than food, drink, and rest for travelers. Innholders rented rooms for meetings of every kind. New Hampshire's government was wholly conducted in taverns from the 1600s until the first state house was built in 1758. Boards of trustees met in taverns; prestigious institutions like Dartmouth College, the New Hampshire Historical Society, and the New Hampshire Medical Society were founded in taverns. Court sessions were held in taverns throughout the 1700s and often during the 1800s. Fraternal organizations like the Freemasons met in the spacious halls often found on the upper floors of the larger taverns. The same rooms were popular for balls and dancing parties.

As remodeled, the Kendall House exhibits several architectural attributes that correspond with tavern use. The western room on the first floor of the original house shows evidence of having

had locks on the door leading from the south entrance of the building, as well as a lock on the closet to the left of its fireplace. These clues suggest that this room could have served as a taproom; the lockable closet could have served to secure liquors. The room is equipped with a fireplace for heat and cooking, with a second fireplace and an oven available nearby in the second kitchen that was provided in the addition to the older house.

The dresser, or set of shelves and cabinets, that stands against the northwest wall of this room was fitted with a number of shelves that are grooved to hold plates in an upright position, typical of the arrangement in a room that was used for cooking and dining. The cabinets below the open shelves, with raised panel doors hung on dovetail hinges, could have secured a wide range of tavern-related implements as well as ordinary kitchen utensils. This room enjoys independent access through a side door of the house (the original front door of the Baldwin House), and could be separated from other parts of the house that might have been reserved for family use. This suggests that it could have served as the taproom as long as Kendall retained his taverner's license. Through the staircase of the older house, the room also enjoys access from cellar to attic. Thus, the room could have been provided with foodstuffs stored either in the basement or the attic, and the bedchambers of the older house could have been made available, as needed, for public accommodation.

Another attribute that many taverns possessed, especially in villages, was a ballroom or meeting hall. One of the remarkable features of the Nathan Kendall, Jr., House is the hinged partition on the northern side of the stairhall on the second floor. When lifted and hooked to the ceiling, this movable partition allows the upper stairhall and the northeast bedchamber to be thrown into a single space having ample natural light and a fireplace for heat. David and Susan Clark state that when the ceiling of the room below was removed or repaired, it was found that the floor of the chamber is a spring floor, intended to act as a resilient surface much favored by dancers in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The presence of such a feature, clearly planned before or during construction, suggests that the addition to the older house was designed to convert the smaller building into a public house, or at least into a private house with facilities for socializing on an expanded scale in the manner already demonstrated in Amherst by Colonel Robert Means, who had such a hinged partition in his own home.

The Kendall House is a remarkable document of architectural and functional change over time. Together with the chronology that has been researched and compiled by Jackie Marshall and Bill Veillette, the house embodies and conveys many chapters of Amherst history. The Kendall House is an excellent illustration of the ability of an artifact to supplement the written word in understanding and interpreting history. Our examination of the house was confined to a few hours, and certainly missed, or misinterpreted, many things that would become clear on a more detailed examination. Even so, the building has revealed much about its past and about the needs and aspirations of several of its owners and occupants. The Kendall House is an important monument in the fabric of Amherst Village, a district that richly deserves its listing in the National Register of Historic Places.